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Trump signs order to remove endangered species protection for grey wolves

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Aleks Phillips

There were 319 Mexican wolves in the wild in the US in 2025, up from just four in 1998

Donald Trump has signed an executive order to remove endangered species protection for the grey wolf and a subspecies, the Mexican wolf.

The US president's decision could pave the way for pastoral farmers to kill the canines to protect their livestock. His order said ranchers played a "vital role" in the food supply chain and American cultural heritage.

But conservation groups have criticised the move, saying it could derail long-term efforts to recover the endangered wolf populations.

There were 319 Mexican wolves in the wild in the US in 2025, up from just four when they were reintroduced in 1998, US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) figures show.

Meanwhile, there are roughly 18,000 grey wolves across the US, though they are still considered endangered as most of their habitat has been destroyed by humans.

An attempt to de-list them at a federal level in 2022 became tied up in litigation, and some campaigners have indicated they intend to do the same of the US Department of Interior acts on Trump's order.

The executive order does not give ranchers immediate license to shoot wolves preying on livestock, but instead gives Interior Secretary Doug Burgum 90 days to determine whether the grey and Mexican wolf populations had recovered

enough to warrant being taken off the endangered species list.

Noting that US livestock herds were at a 75-year low while demand for beef had risen by 10% in the past decade, the order added: "More can and should be done to support this critical industry."

However, environmental groups pointed to studies that suggested wolf attacks on livestock were rare and had little impact on ranchers' income.

"This is a huge distraction to placate a handful of ranchers and make them believe that wolves are a greater threat than President Trump's own policies," said Greta Anderson, deputy director of Western Watersheds Project, which works to conserve wildlife in western US states.

The Wolf Conservation Center noted that ranchers were entitled to up to 100% compensation for any livestock losses caused by wolves under the current system, with individual states providing funding for programmes to deter attacks.

"The Mexican grey wolf is not recovered simply because the population has grown," said Claire Musser, executive director of the Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project. "Weakening federal protections now would put decades of recovery work at risk."

The executive order comes as the Trump administration is seeking to lower record-high beef prices for consumers, **driven by drought** and an **outbreak of parasites** in US beef stocks.

Ranchers have been frustrated by Trump's decision to loosen restrictions on beef imports to address price rises, putting pressure on their already tight margins.

The US government launched a campaign to systematically exterminate wolves towards the end of the 19th Century. This, along with farmers and landowners trapping and killing wolves, pushed them to the brink of eradication.

Ranchers still view them as a nuisance, which tackling lethally constitutes a federal crime.

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